

This is similar to a seed which is not only the *cause* of the production of the sprout but also the *cause* of the deterioration of the sprout.

Our death is an unwanted separation because we desperately cling to our present mind and body; we cling to our friends, our family, to our reputation and the material objects we have accumulated. Thus, without understanding that even though our death is the end of one situation it is also the beginning of something new (in the same way as *every moment* is the "death" of one situation and the beginning of something new), we are terrified of even thinking of death which leads us to behave as though we are going to live forever.

The suffering of aging:

Even though the suffering of aging is usually explained in relation to old age, it can also be explained in relation to children etc., for aging in general is associated with different types of suffering. For instance, babies experience the pain of their first teeth growing; young children suffer from what is called "growing pains"; teenagers encounter the problems of hormonal changes pertaining to puberty, and so forth.

Regarding specifically the suffering of old age, there are five points to contemplate:

- 1) The handsome body deteriorates
- 2) Physical strength and vigour deteriorate
- 3) The senses deteriorate
- 4) Enjoyment of sense objects fades
- 5) (There is) the suffering of the diminishment of one's lifespan

1) *The handsome body deteriorates*

When we are young our skin looks fresh and beautiful, our bodies are flexible and well-shaped, etc. People may admire us for our youthful looks. However, as we grow older all that changes. Our skin loses its freshness and becomes wrinkly, our hair turns grey, our body bends over. In short, we become unattractive and undesirable.

2) *Physical strength and vigour deteriorate*

At a young age we have a lot of strength and energy. We can work hard and easily accomplish what we set out to do. However, at an advanced age our physical strength diminishes and a previously easy task requires great effort.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

For example, when you sit down, you drop like a sack of dirt cut from a rope; when you rise up, it is like uprooting a tree; when you speak, you are incoherent; and when you walk, you stumble.

3) *The senses deteriorate*

At an old age our senses deteriorate; we cannot see, hear, and smell properly anymore. Gradually also our memory starts fading, we forget people's names and are unable to recall what we did yesterday or even an hour ago.

4) *Enjoyment of sense objects fades*

Due to the deterioration of our sense faculties, sense objects do not provide us with the same pleasure they once did. We have difficulty watching a movie, for we cannot properly see and hear what is going on. We are unable to enjoy listening to music or looking at beautiful scenery.

Our appetite weakens and even our favourite food does not taste the way it used to anymore. With some of our teeth missing we have difficulty chewing. Our digestion is weakened and after a meal we feel physically uncomfortable. Even sensations of touch such as sexual activities either no longer hold any attraction or we are physically unable to indulge in them.

5) *(There is) the suffering of the diminishment of one's lifespan*

This refers to the misery of realizing that one has reached the end of one's life and that death is inevitable and approaching fast. One undergoes the suffering of regret for not having made one's life most meaningful. Also, one experiences the fear of having to part from this life's mind and body, from one's friends, relatives and material possessions. On top of that there is the dread of not knowing what comes after death and where one will be reborn.

The suffering of old age is described in the ***Extensive Sport Sutra***:

*As aging progresses and we pass a certain point,
We are like a tree struck by lightning,
Withered by old age like a terrible, decrepit house.
O Sage, speak quickly about an escape from old age.*

*Age enfeebles the masses of men and women
As a windstorm strips vines from a grove of 'Sal' trees.
Age steals our vigour, skill, and strength—
It is as though we are stuck in mud.*

*Age makes attractive bodies unattractive.
Age steals our glory and our strength.
Age steals our happiness and subjects us to insults.
Age takes our vigour, age begets death.*

Moreover, Milarepa composed a beautiful song about the suffering of old age when he encountered an old lady who berated him for begging for alms. He sang this song to her in order for her to realize her situation and to turn to the practice of Dharma.

*To lift you from a chair is like pulling out a tent peg;
With feeble legs
You waddle like a thieving goose;
Earth and stone seem to shatter
When you drop into a seat;
Senile and clumsy is your body.
Grandmother, you have no choice but to obey.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice the Buddha's teaching.
What you require is a qualified and dependable guru.
And from that you may find out how you have changed.*

*Your skin is creased with wrinkles;
Your bones stand out sharply from your shrunken flesh;
You are deaf, dumb, imbecilic, eccentric, and tottering;
You are thrice deformed.
Grandmother, your ugly face is wrapped in wrinkles.
Question your own thought and your mind examine.
You should practice the Buddha's teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable guru,
And then things may be different for you.*

The Kadampa Geshe Chengawa said:

The suffering of death is horrible but brief; how horrible is aging.

The Kadampa Geshe Gamapa said:

It is well that aging happens little by little. If it happened all at once, it would be intolerable.

The suffering of sickness

Regarding the suffering of sickness, there are also five points to contemplate:

- 1) Sickness changes the nature of the body
- 2) Pain and anguish increase and are seldom absent
- 3) There is no desire to enjoy pleasant objects
- 4) One is forced to make use of unpleasant objects, even though one does not want to
- 5) One loses one's vital energy, i.e. one dies

1) Sickness changes the nature of the body

When we get sick, we experience various physical changes. We lose our strength and feel weak and tired; activities that usually come naturally require enormous effort.

